

WEEK 2 – HOME IMPROVEMENT (PEACE)

Sunday – Mark 1:1-8

We've been home for some time now, staring at the cracks in our walls and the faded paint. For many, this has led to a spate of home improvements. John the Baptist calls for us to take a good, hard look inside our souls and make some improvements too. Repent and be forgiven!

THINK: What causes us to be uneasy in our hearts and souls? What don't we like about ourselves? How could we resolve these issues and find peace?

PRAY: Holy Spirit, we repent of those things that mar our relationship with God and with others. Help us to change for the better, that we may be filled with peace at the coming of Jesus Christ. Amen.

DO: Choose something simple at home that has been bugging you for a while. Make a change or repair this week. Does it feel better? Now tackle a little soul-improvement project too.



Monday – Isaiah 40:1-11

John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah – someone who would prepare the way for a King by smoothing out the bumps and straightening out the road. The King is coming to comfort people long afflicted. This ancient text sounds like it also speaks to us as we grind out the last few weeks of 2020.

THINK: How do we prepare for the coming of Jesus? How can we comfort people?

PRAY: O God, the days are short and your Son is coming soon. Help us to prepare the way of the Lord in our homes and hearts. Amen.

DO: This text has been famously and beautifully set to music. Look up “Handel Messiah Comfort Ye” on YouTube and listen to a clip. (<https://youtu.be/83jCTO8NOK4>)

Tuesday – Psalm 85:1-2,8-13

This psalm contains a memory, and a promise. The memory is that God has saved the people in the past. The promise is that God will do it again. Verses 10-11 describe a symbiotic relationship between love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace. The psalmist echoes this week's theme of preparing (v13).

THINK: How has God saved you before? How could this help you have hope for the future?

PRAY: Lord, we can't change the past, and we can't predict the future. So help us to live in the gift of the present and see your hand at work guiding, protecting, and preparing us. Amen.

DO: The Christmas movie “It's a Wonderful Life” plays with this theme of God at work throughout our past, preparing us for our present and future. Watch the movie and discuss.

Wednesday – 2 Peter 3:8-15a

This letter, reportedly written by the Apostle Peter, addressed Christians about three decades after Jesus' resurrection (and very near the end of Peter's life). Clearly some were growing impatient for Jesus' return! But Peter encourages them not to second-guess God's timing or plan, but to make the best use of the time. Peter has some suggestions for living a God-pleasing life while waiting for the advent of Christ.

THINK: Some have talked about “COVID time,” how it seems simultaneously like things are taking forever, *and* happening really quickly. Think about how time might appear to God (v8). How does time seem different for a teenager preparing for a big test, or a woman in the third trimester of pregnancy, or a person working a job, or a senior in assisted living?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, help us to be at peace in the moment – making the best use of the minutes and days as we wait for Christmas. Amen.

DO: Using a timer, try doing different things in one minute. Some ideas – make breakfast; write a note or text to a friend; pray; walk around the house; call someone on the phone; brush your teeth. Does a minute seem long, or short, or just right for these different things?

Thursday – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, writes Paul, and it belongs to God. We are called to take care of our body and make a suitable home for God to live within our hearts. This includes both our physical health, and how we behave (decorate) our home.

THINK: Imagine your body as an actual house. What does it look like? How do you decorate it? Is it ready for guests to visit? What needs to be fixed or changed?

PRAY: God of creation – create in me a new and clean heart. Help me to tell my part of your great story, anticipating the good news of full redemption at your advent. Amen.

DO: Drive or walk around your neighborhood and enjoy the Christmas decorations. What do decorations suggest about what people who live in the houses value... family? tradition? faith? entertainment?

Friday – Matthew 1:18-24

The Nativity story is actually divided between two gospels. Matthew tells it more from the perspective of Mary’s husband-to-be, Joseph. Joseph is portrayed as a gentle and faithful man who trusts God and accepts both his pregnant, teenage bride and his awesome responsibility as stepfather of God’s child.

THINK: When young parents learn that a baby is coming, they begin to make all kinds of changes in their home and in their lives. Talk about what you’ve seen, heard, or done... and why.

PRAY: Lord God, we anticipate a baby at Christmas. And today we look forward to the arrival of our savior Jesus. Help us to get ready for this awesome blessing and responsibility. Amen.

DO: Call or write an encouraging note to someone who is expecting a baby or has a young child.

Sing-along Saturday – “Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear” (<https://youtu.be/qvUAWw9BXy4>)

Christmas carols that include are uncommon. This old German carol captures a sweet moment between the young couple as they prepare to welcome the Christ child into their home. For lyrics, watch the video or see https://hymnary.org/text/gentle_joseph_joseph_dear

THINK: What does it feel like to expect a baby? What brings worry or fear? What brings joy and hope? As we expect Jesus Christ, what fears, worries, hopes and joys do we have?

PRAY: Lord, we are preparing our homes and hearts. We are waiting with mingled anticipation. Help us to enjoy this in-between time to build our loving relationships with you and with each other. Amen.

DO: Do something kind or encouraging for a father you know.